

Group – typed by Zach  
Reflection  
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*Of Mice and Men*

When discussing the book *Of Mice and Men* in terms of its portrayal of and effects on individuals with disabilities, the first character that comes to mind is Lennie. Lennie is a powerfully built man with the brain of a child. Steve likens Lennie to a typical “brute;” a man with ~~superhuman~~ <sup>complex</sup> strength and a subhuman mind. Lennie travels with his companion, George, a small man of small stature and a sharp wit. During our first encounter with George and Lennie, we quickly moved away from George because of his treatment of Lennie. George screams and curses Lennie the way a man would yell at a disobedient dog, and this shocks our holy innocent view of Lennie; it seems like George is yelling at a dog. We see Lennie as a child, because he acts like a child. His mind and actions are similar to a child’s so we automatically assume that Lennie is as innocent as a child is. His curiosity is quenched mostly by his tactile sense, like a four year old. <sup>the author creates this view</sup> <sup>Saint Obonater</sup> Lennie wants to touch anything he can and really explores the world through touching rather than his other senses.

Even after watching *I am Sam*, we still recognize Lennie as being an asexual being; one who is completely clueless about the advances of Curly’s wife or why touching a girl’s dress would be wrong. Lennie as an asexual being supports and is supported by this idea of Lennie being nothing more than an innocent child.

As the story develops and we begin to understand the two companions’ history, our sympathy moves away from Lennie to George. We begin to see Lennie as an object of burden for George; an object he continuously sacrifices his lifestyle to protect and

defend. Lennie's constant trouble destroys George's only chance at a normal life and forces him to move from town to town. Steinbeck purposely develops Lennie as an object of burden to gather more audience sympathy around George, rather than Lennie. Taking the audience's sympathy away from Lennie helps Steinbeck create Lennie as a "brute" or an object of menace.

good point

yes!

Throughout the novel Lennie causes physical damage and death to others. He does so without realization, having no clue about his strength, but in the end he still kills. These damages plague Lennie and George wherever they go, forcing them to move from town to town. Steinbeck portrays Lennie as a menace, not only to himself, but also to George and society as a whole. In the world that Steinbeck creates, there is no place for Lennie; hence George realizes this and takes Lennie out of the world in which he does not belong. Steinbeck deliberately creates a world and a character that are unable to coexist, so rather than disturb the world anymore, he simple takes the character out of it. It seems that Steinbeck creates it this way so the audience is forced into the logical decision that Lennie must die.

✓

Steinbeck creates a parallel between an old dog and Lennie to take away some of Lennie's humanity and make it easier for the audience to see Lennie's death as a positive outcome. Steinbeck describes the death of an old dog by shooting it in the back of the head; he tries to make it seem a merciful death. The parallel is not only in how the two die, but in that they die by the same gun. So it seems that Steinbeck may be trying to say that Lennie's death is not so tragic because he is more like a dog than a human.

✓

The historical backdrop to this story is the height of the eugenics movement, a movement where euthanasia, sterilization, and confinement were common ideas about

great insight

how to deal with people with disabilities. It seems that Steinbeck uses Lennie to show that people with disabilities are a menace to society. They are a burden to society as a whole and most often create problems that society is responsible for dealing with. The point being that no matter how childlike they are, they still cause trouble and injure other people. In the end, people with disabilities are simply a burden on society and society would best be served by their absence.

The real problem we had in dealing with this book is whether Steinbeck is writing this book as a how to get rid of them manual or as a let me shock people into disgrace. It is too difficult to determine if Steinbeck is speaking for or against the eugenics movement. It is hard to believe that anyone could see Lennie's death as a positive ending, yet when placed against the eugenics movement anything is possible. We know that we have a larger realization for how a simple story can be twisted to shape how a person's mind will perceive the actions. This book forces us to see how the eugenics movement gained support. Steinbeck easily created a logical path that could only end with the death of Lennie. Even with us, at the beginning of the book we sided with Lennie, but by the end Steve and I saw that Lennie could not survive in the world Steinbeck had created. So realizing how easily we switched support away from Lennie, it helps us realize how easily people can be duped into seeing the eugenics movement as a positive thing.

While discussing this book, we realized how large a mark this book has made on our society's views about people with mental disabilities. The stereotypical response is to think of the "dumb brute." We thought of a "brute" common in the *Looney Tunes* cartoons; a powerful snow monster or other large animal that crushes Bugs while simply

It would be interesting to research this.

yes!

wanting to play, using the classic line “a little bunny of my own to pet and love.” Or having been hit in the head, a character begins to mumble “which way did he go George? Which way did he go?” We find it funny because the character is acting like someone with mental retardation. We find the character to be an object of amusement, just as most children do.

This is  
pure  
brilliance  
S

*Of Mice and Men* challenges are thoughts on not only how we view individuals with disabilities, but also how we look at the eugenics movement. The book forces us to see through the eyes of the movement’s supporters and understand how they could agree with the eugenics.

**Reference:**  
Steinbeck, J. (1937) *Of Mice and Men*. Penguin Books

The best, most  
thoughtful  
& insightful  
analysis of this  
book I've ever  
received ✓ TTTF